3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
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and the notched sticks were only an *aide-mémoire*, not a necessity. 211

The heavens and the earth

When the Pleiades appeared just before dawn they said the Pleiades were being 'reborn' (the word used for the new moon's appearance and for the initiation of a diviner), and that in this position in the heavens they were heralds of the cold season. They knew the relative positions of Venus as an evening star and a morning star, and watched for the appearance high in the heavens of Jupiter which they knew by its size. Orion they recognized as a man with a spear, a hunter, and the Milky Way as the sands of the sky, since sand was used to denote numbers which cannot be counted. 821 ●

In announcing the death of a great chief by a messenger sent from village to village, the traditional formula was: 'Listen. Do you hear? The heavens have fallen.' Hence when earthquakes were felt, it was believed that some great chief had died, and the earthquake was the trembling when his spirit left the earth for the place of the departed spirits. If it turned out to be no one of their own people, they nevertheless held to the belief that somewhere, unknown to them, a 'great one' had died and his spirit had departed at the time of the earth's trembling. 763 775 823

Eclipses of the sun and moon they also connected with some great event either among their own people or elsewhere, and they used the eclipse year and month to date these events. Their famous crossing of the Zambezi on their northward march, finally and irrevocably cutting off their connexions with the south, was during a solar eclipse. In teaching young adults Ngoni history they said: 'When we crossed the Zambezi it became night at noon.' 821 [167]

A lunar eclipse, almost total, occurred when I was in a chief's village, and all the people were called to the kraal and stood watching it. Then the chief's spokesman, his 'mouthpiece', called for silence in the phrase used for a war summons [632]

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821 or other pregnant announcement: 'Listen. Do you hear? The chief says there is a great matter being discussed. It is not here but elsewhere. The case is very important.' Then the women took their poles and struck the tall wooden pounding mortars with resounding blows. A Ngoni elder commented to me: 'Listen. They are washing the moon from its clouds, so that it may come out of the darkness and shine again.' The event was curiously reminiscent of an eclipse during my stay in an Indian village when pots were struck 'to wash the moon'.

Reckoning of numbers

802 The Ngoni used tens as units in counting. They began with the right hand clenched, like the fist they raised in the traditional greeting. One by one they raised from the bent-in position the thumb and each finger in turn, and then did the same with the left hand. When they reached ten they struck one hand against the other with all the fingers extended and said '*ihlumi*' (ten), and for twenty, thirty and so on they struck their hands together the correct number of times. For one hundred they used the word '*ikulu*', but it was generally agreed that this had not been in their original counting [177] terms, but had been brought in when the Zulu Bible came to them with the first Scottish missionaries.

Ngoni history

814 To a people like the Ngoni whose remembered past was one of migrations, conquests and settlement in a new country, their history was no dead verbal record but a living reminder [196] of their past achievements, and of their cultural and political differences from the people around them in Nyasaland. There were many occasions in Ngoni village life, especially in the villages of chiefs and heads of leading clans when recitals of history took place. Frequent references were made to historical events in songs, court cases, when visiting Ngoni came, in the vernacular readers used in the Scottish Mission

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which his army was defeated. The warriors knew that they would be killed when they got back to the great Zulu despot, and so they fled north, fighting as they went. As they went along, they conquered and absorbed the tribes, gathering Swazi, Atonga, and a medley of people into the nation. They came to the Zambezi, and on the day when they crossed it they were terrified by a total eclipse of the sun. From the Zambezi they fought their way to Nyasaland, then striking west, they passed through the Senga and Wemba populations till they reached Lake Tanganyika. On the plateau there the first great chief died. He had become infirm in his latter days, and travelled about riding on an ox. At his funeral a terrible massacre took place. One section of the tribe, eager to observe the old bloody funeral ceremonies, surprised and murdered all the widows of the chief that their spirits might accompany the dead chief to the other world. This butchery aroused great indignation among the others, and the tribe split in two. The butchers remained at the S.E. of Lake Tanganyika, where they still are a terror to the surrounding people. The great part of the tribe however, again marched south. One of the sons of the paramount chief was appointed his successor. His name was Mombera. His four brothers, Mpezeni, Mperembe, Maurau, and Mtwaro, were given large and powerful sub-chieftainships under him. This led to a scattering and readjustment of the tribe. Mperembe remained as chief and conquerer over the northern people, keeping the wild Wemba, and other tribes under his suzerainty. Mombera, along with two other brothers, settled in the highlands to the north-west of Nyasa. And Mpezeni went south and gradually got so far separated from the others that his people became an independent and insolated section of the tribe. A few years ago, the British Government levied war on Mpezeni, and his country came under the British Government.

In the north also, Mperembe was sore driven through his separation from the main section of the tribe, and at last his people rebelled, and with the aid of the Wemba, drove him south to join hands with his brother Mombera the paramount chief. Around Mombera the great part of the Ngoni nation remained. Some of his head men started petty chieftainships to the south among whom were Mandala, and Mwasi. Their people are called the Central and Southern Ngoni, and are well known in the Blantyre district as labourers, but they are not Ngoni. Few of them can speak the Zulu or Ngoni language, and they are a poor effeminate and cow-

13:Fraser M-5 (ca. 1890) 1901
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their anger and propitiate them. Yet this recognition is not made in any degree of affection but in the times of dark necessity. When the rain has not fallen, when locusts swarm and eat up their crops, when sickness and death are abroad in the village, the spirits are working out their vengeance for being neglected. Then they are remembered and sacrifice is made. There are also certain ceremonial observances on important occasions. Before the gardens are hoed, and when the reaping time draws near; if an army is going out to battle, or when a coronation takes place, then prayer is made. The confusion of the old and new ideas was amusingly illustrated at the last coronation ceremony, when Mperembe, the eldest sub-chief, sacrificed a bull, and offering it to the spirit of the dead chief prayed him to bless the new chief, then added, "and, O Mombera, bless the teachers when they go about teaching the people the words of God." There was something very beautiful in this recognition of Christianity as but a fuller shining of the dim light they had.

Their old men are full of stories and traditions, some of them are uncommonly like the stories of Uncle Remus, and others with a curious echo of Old Testament story. There is a hill near Ekwendeni, where tradition says a great tower was built by the Tumbuka to reach into the moon. But the white ants ate away the foundation and the tower fell and the people were killed. I passed below this hill when I was on my way home, and chaffed my carriers on trying to build so great a tower with wood. They laughed, and said, "But do you know the story of the hill over there?" pointing to the north. No, I said, what is it? And they told me how that long ago the Tumbuka found the country too narrow, so they decided to climb into heaven and cultivate new gardens there. So they gathered the nation together and cut down all the trees, and began to build a huge tower on this hill. When they had got a great way up, some cried "Stop, we need build no more. Here is a ladder coming down out of heaven." And they looked up and saw great roots hanging down. So the people caught hold of these roots and began climbing hand over hand up to heaven. But suddenly while they were all climbing, the roots broke, and the nation fell to the earth and was snuffed out.

Like other children of nature there are men and women in the tribe who seem to have a wonderful gift of second sight. Forty years ago a regiment went out on a great raid. The witch doctor in blessing them told them that they would meet a white man